

Sap's Running!

On March 6, Governor John Lynch officially opened the 2006 New Hampshire Maple Season when he tapped a maple tree at Benton's Sugarhouse in Thornton. With warming weather this week, maple producers report that the sap is indeed running at many locations around the state and boiling the sap into the rich, golden syrup has begun.

New Hampshire produced approximately 57,000 gallons of syrup in 2005, a lower than average production year. Sugar makers hope to improve that as they fire up their evaporators for 2006. Annual production has exceeded 100,000 gallons of maple syrup historically. The 2005 maple crop was valued at approximately \$3 million.

Maple sugaring season typically lasts 4-6 weeks, beginning mid February to mid March and often running into April. Usually, sap starts flowing in southern orchards first and progresses north. The weather and temperature are critical factors affecting the start and duration of sugaring activities. With the onset of warm days in the early spring, sap of sugar maple trees begins to flow through the tree's system after spending the winter in a dormant state. The combination of cold nights to about 20 degrees F and warm days into the 40's creates the ideal sap flow. Maple sugaring does not occur everywhere, but is limited to the colder, northern climates where sugar maple trees grow.

Sugar makers tap into the tree's vascular system to collect the sweet, clear, water-like sap. They busily place taps, or spouts, throughout the maple orchard several weeks before the sap begins to flow so everything is ready for collection. Some sugar-makers place several thousand taps, depending on the size of their sugarbush, or orchard. To make maple syrup, the sap is boiled to evaporate most of the water. Maple syrup is formed when sugars in the sap become concentrated. The amber color develops during the boiling process and the unique maple flavor becomes more pronounced. It takes about forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of maple syrup.

New Hampshire maple syrup and maple products are available throughout the year at sugar houses and other outlets around the state, but the production season is only a short period each spring. If you are interested in visiting a sugar house this spring, you can obtain a list of operations near you by contacting the NH Maple Phone at 225-3757 or the NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food at 271-3788. Special activities are planned for **New Hampshire Maple Weekend**, scheduled for March 25 & 26. Visit the NH Maple producers Association website at www.nhmapleproducers.com for more information on this and other maple events.

--Gail McWilliam Jellie, Director

Division of Agricultural Development

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